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The Institute of Sacred Literature

THE VALUE OF A BIBLE CLUB IN THE CHURCH

An increase in the activity of the Christian pastor along the lines of the teaching ministry is a subject frequently under discussion. The objection is raised that the pastor is already overworked with his pulpit and weekly meetings, and must leave this seemingly narrower work to members of his congregation. This is doubtless in many cases a valid excuse, but the following statements, made by a pastor of a large city church, who has himself been for several years the leader of a most successful Institute Bible club, show that there may be stimulus and even a cumulative practical value to the pastor in the necessities connected with the teaching of a Bible class or club:

"1. *A Bible club compels the pastor to study the Bible comprehensively.* Study of the Bible for sermon preparation is dangerous when taken alone. Many preachers will confess that the Bible has become to them little more than a repository of texts. When they read a prophecy or a gospel, a psalm or an epistle, it is with a wide-open eye for something that can be worked into the next Sunday's sermon. He who reads the Bible thus is like the mountain climber who ever walks stooping, peering closely for a sight of pebbles or blossoms in his path, but never lifting up his eyes to survey the landscape. The world is suffering from narrow horizons.

"2. *It furnishes the pastor an abundance of sermonic material.* Instead of finding it necessary to search for texts, he has only to choose from the many which throng him, inviting his study and promising comfort and strength to those who shall hear as he interprets. He who instructs, by the question-and-answer method, a class of intelligent, alert Christians in a Bible-club course need never be compelled to turn over the leaves of his Bible in nervous and distracted haste to find a text from which he can evolve a message suited to the hour; for the Bible, when diligently studied, proves itself to be a storehouse of material which is rich and varied, and timely as well.

"3. *It suggests to him new lines of investigation.* The Bible-club materials, while requiring a study of the text of Scripture first of all and chiefly, are so prepared as to lead the mind into new channels. These materials are arranged by specialists, who not only know the text of the Scriptures treated, but are also familiar with the literature which has grown up around such portions of Scripture, and though without dogmatic assertions, the lessons are so wisely and ably presented that they are valuably suggestive.

"Whatever increases the pastor's fitness to preach is an advantage to the church. When this improvement of qualifications on the part of the pastor is

attended by a corresponding improvement in the attainments of a considerable number of the members of the church, the advantage is yet greater. Herein the value of the Bible club appears.

"4. *It sets an example of earnest Bible study.* The people have before them continually an object-lesson which reminds or assures or persuades them that the pastor and a certain number of others believe it to be worth while to study the Bible more than the ordinary Christian studies it; and that it is also worth while to be as persevering and earnest in the learning of Bible lessons as in learning lessons in purely secular subjects. This is an idea which has not yet gained full possession of the ordinary mind. The Bible is "searched," perhaps, but rather for texts than truth, for promises than knowledge, and for comforts in dark hours than for that full comprehension of God's revelation which will keep the soul continually in the light. The Bible club is at once a protest and an invitation. It protests against that neglect of the Scriptures which is the habit of the many, and invites all to a study which shall remove from the Christian church the reproach of indifference to God's revelation.

"5. *It raises up in the church a class of men and women who are qualified to teach the Scriptures.* In many churches it is difficult to find teachers for the classes in the Sunday school. Yet more difficult is it to find competent teachers. If the average Christian, who perhaps knows a great many precious texts, from which he has derived comfort many times, and who understands well the way of salvation through Jesus Christ, is called upon suddenly to take charge of a class in the Sunday school, he urges his want of preparation, and dares not face the class with only the Bible as a help. His caution is prudent. With only the Bible in hand, the lesson would be a blank to him. He knows so little of the Scriptures that before he can teach an ordinary passage even passably he must make careful preparation. This surely ought not to be. A Christian of average intelligence, who has reached mature years, ought to be so familiar with a large portion of the Scriptures that he would not feel himself utterly lost if brought suddenly face to face with an ordinary Sunday-school lesson. To remove this ignorance, and consequent want of preparation for service, the Bible club enters the church. Its work is done thoroughly and without haste. The Scriptures are studied methodically and systematically. There is drill upon the great outlines of history and doctrine, until these have lodged in the mind to abide. Then all future reading enlarges the crystallizations around these fixed portions of truth, and the student becomes competent to teach, at a moment's notice, with some degree of intelligence, and, if permitted time to make special preparation, he can bring forth out of the treasure-house of the Word things new and old. The presence in a church of a number of persons thus equipped is an inestimable blessing."

In view of this testimony we ask from every reader of these pages earnest consideration of the question whether an Institute of Sacred Literature Bible Club would not be a means to some desirable end in religious education in his church or the community.